Council of Europe Seminar March 2008 Intercultural Dialogue on the University Campus

Defining the Sources of Intercultural Conflict and Their Effects

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Defining Intercultural Conflict

- Intercultural conflict has been defined as the perceived or actual incompatibility of values, norms, processes, or goals between a minimum of two cultural parties over content, identity, relational, and procedural issues (Ting-Toomey 1999).

Types of Intercultural Conflict

- highly durable historical forms of hostility, hatred and grievance,

- newly articulated forms of hostility, hatred and grievance,

- everyday cultural ignorance, miscommunication and misrecognition of difference

Ways of Carrying out Conflict

- individual acts of disrespect, discrimination and hostility
- civic or peaceful methods of propaganda, negotiation and campaigning,
- localised, short-lived riots and group violence
- large-scale violent conflicts and wars

Sociological explanations

- transition from 'early conditions of relatively closed societies to 'universal eras' of societies marked by economic and social interdependence

- increasingly complex patterns of movement and cultural interaction produces two opposing positions

- cosmopolitanism : openness to others, recognition and acceptance of difference and the universalist view that all are equal and everyone is different

- anti-cosmopolitanism : hostility to cultural, linguistic and cultural differences, and exclusion of and contempt for threatening racial, ethnic or cultural groups

- 'a dialectic of cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism has begun', (Beck 2005:136).

Challenging primordial explanations

- Intercultural conflicts are not natural or primordial

- Cultural and ethnic groups cannot be defined by biology or kinship they are socially constructed

- Genomics indicates mixed historical origins of population groups and challenges fictitious notions of common biological descent

- Claims to 'purity' in the protection and formation of cultural, ethnic or racial identity have no scientific basis

Sources of Conflict 1. Hyper/Super-Diversity

Diverse Conflicts

- The construction of racial, ethnic, national and cultural hostility and its expression through racism, xenophobia, intolerance, discrimination, conflict and violence is dynamic and complex

Super-Diverse Contexts (Vertovec 2005)

- Rapidly changing cultural environment, resulting from increasingly complex migration flows, claims for recognition of ethnic and cultural identities and expanding international networks of production and consumption.

Sources of Conflict 2.
The View of European Ministers of Culture

- cultural 'impoverishment' and marginalisation

- prejudice and ignorance

- violence and stereotypes of others

- opposition to the recognition of difference and multiplicity in the world

- refusal to acknowledge cultural diversity and democratic openness

- political, economic and social causes complex and multiple (Conference Declaration, 2003)

Sources of Intercultural Conflict 3.

- Political e.g. disputes over territory

- Economic e.g. control over resources, worsening conditions, inequalities

- Cultural e.g. disputes over language and religion

Precipitating Factors

- *Perceived affronts to a community's honour or dignity* e.g. Jyllands-Posten cartoons controversy (Esman 2005)

- *Tangible threats to the vital interests of a cultural or ethnic group* e.g. working class community perceptions of non-white or non-European migrants

- *Fresh opportunities to gain advantages or redress grievances* e.g. post-Soviet transition

Global Intercultural Crisis

- better theory and greater understanding of cultural and racial identities, hostilities and related 'human waste' (Winant 2006)

- deepening 'structural' divisions and planetary racial and cultural stratification (EUMC/FRA reports)

European NGO evidence

- attacks against Muslim people and Muslim targets

- increasing racist violence and crime against newer vulnerable immigrant groups including irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

- continuing violence and abuse towards the Roma

Levels of Explanation 1.

- meta explanations, which draw on dominant theoretical explanations, such as competition theory

- meso explanations, which can be read as local, situated, contextual readings of why conflict occurs in certain settings

- micro explanations, which emphasise individual biographies, attitudes and behaviours

Levels of Explanation 2.

- International economic, political and social processes

- National historical cultural reservoir of racisms, nationalisms and other ethnic and cultural memories

- Local disputes, identities and informal norms and networks

Motives for Intercultural Conflict

- *Ideological*

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- *Bigots*

- *Emotional Conflict*

- *Criminal-Materialist*

- *Territorial-Political*

- *Social Group Norms*

Motiveless/Unintentional Intercultural Conflict

- Ignorance of different values, norms and behaviours in different ethnic communities and cultures

- Differing value assumptions, expectations, verbal and nonverbal habits

- Problem of creating new cultural stereotypes

- Offensive behaviour which causes conflict may derive from lack of respect for difference rather than unintentional ignorance

- Repeated offensive behaviour may change from being unintentional to being intentional

Intercultural dialogue and the American campus experience

- Chesler et al (2005) *Challenging Racism in Higher Education*

- Widespread use of intercultural and intergroup dialogue on USA campuses

- Conditions for success: equal status relations, sustained interaction, self-disclosure, empathetic connection and engagement in a common task

- Groups of people in conflict and from markedly different cultures have improved their mutual understanding and relationships

Building the Anti-racist HEI: UK innovation toolkit project

- **www.leeds.ac.uk/cers/toolkit/toolkit.htm**

Aims

- Promote antiracism / challenge racism

- Value cultural diversity / avoid Eurocentrism

- Provide appropriate and professional teaching inclusive of all people

Content

- Conceptual, legal and organisational tools for improving practice across HEI sector

Conceptual Tools

- Institutional Racism

- Whiteness

- Eurocentrism

Context of racial, ethnic and cultural hostility in universities

- Everyday part of life in HEIs

- Procedures inadequate

- Feelings of exclusion

- Interventions little impact

- Openness to change

Challenging racial, ethnic and cultural hostility in universities

- Whole institution approach
- Teacher stereotypes and behaviour
- Student perceptions and behaviour
- Effective leadership -being proactive
- Listening and consultation
- Innovations - posts, programmes, policies

Questions for academic staff

- what do you do to encourage students to understand and value cultural and ethnic diversity?

- how do you make sure that your teaching creates an environment free of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, where students can contribute fully and freely and feel valued?

- how does your teaching take account of students' cultural backgrounds, language needs, and different learning styles?

- how do extra-curricular activities and events cater for the interests or needs of all students, and take account of any concerns about religion or culture?

Conclusion

- Need for HEIs to rethink their role in multi-cultural societies

- Create new cultural ethos

- Challenge entrenched privilege / hostility

- Exploit opportunities and spaces for intercultural progress and innovation